

A. E. Sloan

Good ~~morning~~, my name is Dr. A.E. Sloan, a cattle rancher and Veterinarian from Santa Paula. I serve in the leadership of the California Cattlemen's Association as chairman of the Cattle Health Committee. I also have an appointment to the Governor's Cattle Disease Task Force as an advisor to the Animal Health Branch of the CDFA. I own and manage a ~~family owned~~ cattle ranch in Ventura County. My family has been in Ventura and Los Angeles Counties since 1896 owning and operating cattle operations. I am the third generation of California cattlemen to work these lands and there are two more generations waiting to continue ranching, if possible. All that having been said, I go by Bud and am very glad to be able to be here today. I would like to applaud the department for taking a proactive stance to look to the future of agriculture, which I hope serves as a reminder for all, that California's number one economic driver isn't tourism or computer chips, but rather the industry that produces food and fiber for our nation, and increasingly the world.

Looking to the future can be difficult and as we've seen for generations, the only thing that remains constant in agriculture is that things always continue to change. The state's cattle industry is no exception. Since the arrival of Portola and the Spanish, ranches and cattle herds have been a huge part of the dynamic agricultural industry we know today. The only certainty has been change itself. We've all grown accustomed to change.

□ What is my vision for California agriculture by 2030?

Cattle ranchers own or manage nearly 30 million acres in California, a fact that demonstrates the prevalence of the industry and underscores the importance of maintaining ranching families to provide stewardship and economic support for our state's land and water resources, wildlife and communities.

Twenty-two years from now, I hope California agriculture and California's beef industry in particular will remain world leaders in innovation and production of safe and healthy products.

There is a continuing trend toward a global marketplace and increasing demand for our products overseas as well as foreign investment in cattle processing facilities in the U.S., California's producers will be raising beef not just for the United States, but for hungry consumers all around the world.

A positive vision for the future includes a strong, mature industry that is recognized outside of agriculture for the many benefits it provides to California and the nation.

While at times it is tempting to look for a rollback to a simpler operating environment; but continued off-farm demographic changes and California's established and, seemingly, much relished role as world leaders in regulatory development, make that



scenario unlikely, and we can fully expect in 2030 to remain part of the world's foremost regulatory environmental regime.

Part of a vision for a successful industry in 2030, however, includes more certainty in the production environment, both economically and regulatory-wise. This will allow producers to focus on the business at hand rather than concerns about decisions made in government that limit the availability of land and water resources upon which food production depends.

Inherent in that, is recognition of the fact that California law dictates standards far beyond that required for commodity production. Because of the many additional steps and precautions taken in production in California, food products from our state are of the highest quality in the world but produced at an economic disadvantage.

□ What will be the biggest challenge in achieving that vision?

The biggest hurdle to achieving this vision is lack of understanding by the average person of the challenges of agriculture and the value of our safe, stable and affordable food supply.

Improved awareness from the general public will be the only thing that stems attacks from interest group on family farmers and ranchers that make it significantly more difficult to operate a successful business here in comparison to neighboring states or other countries. The initiative on the November ballot attempting to dictate husbandry and animal care is an example of special interest groups challenging science and university developed and approved husbandry practices with emotionally charged distortions of what is and is not humane and ethical treatment. Education of the public as to just where their food and fiber comes from is not just convenient or helpful, it is a must. The general public must understand us in order to appreciate us. There are many of them and so few of us.

Another significant challenge is the current trend in California relative to land and water use and conversion. Most of the emphasis appears to be toward development and municipal uses as well as the production of high-value crops. Livestock production ceases to be the highest-value use of many parcels of land throughout the state. Livestock production is pushed to the fringes in lieu of grapes, grains, other higher-value crops and houses now occupy many historic rangelands.

California's beef cattle industry is working even now with a broad group of stakeholders through the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition to raise awareness of the many public benefits of rangeland and open space in California and to keep ranchers viable and productive on the land. At the same time the industry is working to share the positive story of significant efforts underway to improve those land and water resources through voluntary conservation efforts in partnership with a host of local, state and federal agencies and nongovernmental entities.

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In the past my family has worked with the Dept of Fish and Game through the Private Lands Management Program to improve habitat for wild life and conserve water. Nearly every cattleman in Ventura County has worked with or attempted to work with the Ventura County Fire Dept to arrange Prescription Burns on our private lands. Unfortunately not nearly enough has been done to prevent the wildfires we are now experiencing throughout our state. We, on the fringes of avocado and citrus ranches and high value farm products, are the Wildland/Urban Interface. Every year our cattle graze grasslands and break-down brush that would serve as fuel to the winds of September and October. The cost of fighting wildfires is somewhere north of 10: 1 to the cost of prescription burns. The public needs to know this and support these Prescription Burns.

At the same time, those who remain in the business are subject to the world's foremost regulatory regime, a series of requirements and exclusions that dictate production practices – and increase production costs – in our state more than any other location in the world.

Regulation that already exists and particularly new regulation under consideration targeting mitigation of environmental concerns, strike agriculture, which depends so intimately on natural resources, like no other industry. Cattle production and thoughtful grazing practices, rather than serving as significant contributors to air and water pollution, is entirely consistent with continued resource management. There has been some severely flawed research reports that incriminate cattle, sheep, and goats as CO2 producers that lead to Global Warming. Whether or not one buys into the Global Warming scenario, it is extremely important to realize the exchange rate of Co2 for O2 on the range and wood lands that California's livestock inhabit. When and if carbon credits are stock-in-trade, Cattlemen will be the bankers.

These trends will contribute to industry changes, including consolidation toward larger operators, working on either additional owned or leased properties. Those who can afford to retain their lands and pay the increasing costs of compliance. Adaptation will occur and functional programs that allow leasing from federal, state, municipal and other non owner-operated properties will become even more important to sustaining private base properties.

Should the environment become continually more difficult, keeping producers here will itself become a challenge. Farmers and ranchers are price takers in competitive markets, rather than price makers, and many have found that it is simpler to move their entire operations to more welcoming environments than to continue in California.

□ In 2030, how has the public perception of agriculture changed?

Public perception of agriculture has been a victim of the increase in the distance from farms and ranches to the consumer's plate. As fewer and fewer among California's 30 plus million residents have any true connection to the food they eat, it will be no surprise

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that the respect and understanding of agriculture will diminish. Every individual needs to appreciate the availability of a safe, varied and affordable food supply.

Recent trends toward local awareness have seen some increased interest in food production, but not yet to the level required to provide any real change. This must occur, and will bring with it not only public interest, but also increasing scrutiny of production practices and ethics.

The expectation from many in the public that farmers and ranchers follow appropriate production ethics will not change. And judging by the recent oversight of environmental and animal welfare issues it is hoped that the public will continue to increase its understanding of agriculture.

□ What is a "must have" in an Ag Vision for California?

From a statewide perspective, it is critical that any vision for the future of California agriculture include public education for those who don't realize how their lives are affected positively by those of us in agriculture.

Most importantly, one perception that must be realized is that while farmers and ranchers work every day to adapt to a changing environment, given the significant challenges facing agriculture today, many family farms and ranches that have operated in this state for generations may not last until 2030 if we don't see some relief.

Thank you again for taking the time to work with those of us in production agriculture to look to the future of our industry in California. I hope these comments are some assistance and I would be happy to further discuss any of these points with you. I sincerely hope that California continues to have a strong vision for agriculture so that the California families living on and working the land will have the option to keep ranching, today, and in future generations.

A handwritten signature, possibly "ef", is enclosed within a hand-drawn oval.